Serenata Yucatán

para guitarra percutiva y canto

Notes of composition

Composed during the Fall of 2004, at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music, as part of the Master's composition program under the guidance of my dear friend and maestro, Michael Horvit, the first ideas on composing this *serenata* read like the following:

> ...somewhat like a collection of small gems or flower arrangements for the guitar...
> ...resembling a set of pieces made specifically of guitarristic traits... such as tremolos, glissandos,
> natural harmonics, scalar passages, arpeggios, chordal sections and *rasgueados*.

The original plan was to create a solo piece for guitar in the fashion of a short collection of etudes but without the 'squareness' and somewhat lifeless character of virtuosic etude writing.

At the time of composing this piece I enjoyed reading two of my favorite books: '*Paredes con espejos*' by my uncle, José Ramón Enríquez,[1] and 'The Birth of Tragedy' by Friedrich Nietzsche.[2] Both of these books continue to inspire me on communicating a balanced discourse between both sides of the brain, and help me piece together a chain of events that experiments on rational thoughts as well as inspirational ideas; in other words, reconciling Aristotelic views with Platonic views or merging the worlds of Apollo and Dyonisos.

In its construction, the most important techniques used were motivic development and change of character in each section. This was accomplished by juxtaposing timbral differences as producers of contrast, such as harmonic events against free cadential melodic sections. Being this piece outlined with a stress on small sets, the connectedness of these, however, presented a braid for a larger design explained as follows:

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[1] *Paredes con Espejos, José Ramón Enríquez, UNAM, 2003.*

[2] *The Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche, Penguin Classics, 1999.*

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The principal theme of the entire work is stressed on one particular event: Death and its surrounding aspects and concepts as viewed from a traditional meso-american point of view and a personal one too. Starting in a deep and meditative character, the piece opens with a prelude called '*Chiconahuapan*', which in *Nahuatl*, the Aztec tongue, means: 'crossing the river of nine'. In many cultures, such as the Mayan, Aztec and even the Egyptian, among others, the representations of accompanied and guided voyages of the deceased by a dog, which helps to cross watery surfaces after death and before re-birth or re-generation, appear constantly. In this introductory prelude, the idea of crossing the nine rivers is depicted by an ongoing meter change from nine beats to one and finally to nothingness. The next sections in this first movement are: '*Despertando el largo sueño*' (Waking from a long dream), a short meditation that builds towards an expressive cadenza called 'Cadenza de la nueva vida' (Cadenza of the new life), which leads expressively into a section called '*Contemplación improvisatoria*' (Improvisatory contemplation), a small section that creates a sense of rest before the faster sections of the movement. '*Danza del corazón alegre*' (Dance of the joyful heart) is a lively joyous section, tied to the next one called '*Huapango amistoso*' (Friendly *Huapango*), a traditional rhythmic *rasgueado*. The first movement culminates in a precise line of natural harmonics and a cadential movement of the *tabla*, a percussive shake on the guitar's wooden body.

The second movement is in two sections. An introductory lament marked: driven by force, followed by a section called '*Tristeza*', a simple melody framed by pedal tones. Here the idea is to present the event of death from a living experience' point of view which is often related with a cry of sadness culminating in tears.

The next movement is the '*Serenata*' (Serenade). Here, I elaborated an arrangement of '*Lágrimas*' by the twentieth century mexican composer, Luis Martínez Serrano. The text's implores the 'sad one' to stop crying.

¿Por qué en tus ojos llenos de encanto
miro una llágrima de pesar?
Si tu bien sabes que te amo tanto
que sufro mucho al verte llorar.

¿Cuál es la causa de tus enojos
que hace a tu llanto raudo brotar?
Ven a mis brazos seca tus ojos
me pones triste no llores mas.

Cuando en tus ojos se transparentan
las lagrimitas como el cristal,
siento al beberlas sabor a hieles
sabor a acibar, por Dios no llores más.

Luis Martínez Serrano

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The next movement is called '*Un encuentro mágico*' (A magical encounter). Here the idea is to heal the sadness of death by an spontaneous improvisatory experiment. This movement starts with a pentatonic scale which should transform itself into an improvisatory flight alternated with two notated frames included at the appendix. From a macrocosmic view, this movement resembles in design a large portamento. The improvisatory material can be anything and can be presented in any style or way.

The next movement is called '*Contracanto*'. Originally this is a composition from 1998. Most of the material of the entire *Serenata* is worked out from this movement. The idea here is to allow oneself to feel healed and ready to embrace life once more in understanding that death itself is every moment and that its opposite: birth, is also a complement of this never ending cycle. Philosophically, this suggests that life's opposite is not death and that within its own cycle, death is always overcomed by birth. Perhaps this is why the ancient meso-american thought on death was not tragic but rather a beautiful way to start anew. By way of sacrifice, life is given chance to re-generate itself through its internal cycle of death and birth. This is why this would be a challenging piece to play but substantial to listen to and interesting to look for.

The writing of *Serenata Yucatán*, in one way or another, is also inspired by two of my favorite composers. Heitor Villalobos and Giorgÿ Ligeti. I truly admire Villalobos because of his natural arrangements of structured fret positions. Also, I admire Ligeti because of his sense of experimentation and use of up-to-date popular material. The guitar is an instrument developed in Spain during the late Renaissance but its impact in México was a very fruitful one; even though it is believed that Mayan culture did not have stringed instruments, I have seen how now a days the guitar is an important popular instrument in the region.

In December of 2004 I made a trip to *Mérida, Yucatán*, to visit my uncle, José Ramón. This trip made for an important design on the piece because then I would need to include some aspects of the culture of such region. While I was able to retrieve a few historical data like pentatonic scales and instrumental designs, I was not able to find any trace of ancient Mayan music, so I turned to make an arrangement on a beautiful *yucatecan* song of the early 20th century. The name of this song is '*Lágrimas*' and it was originally written by Luis Martínez Serrano. By doing this I would go to *Mérida* and give several concerts on music inspired by the Mayan cosmos and the traditional *trova*[3] of the region. It was a complete success!

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[3] Trova is the trouvador music of the island of Cuba and the Yucatecan peninsula.

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Serenata Yucatán

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(2004)



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Despertando el largo sueño



Cadenza de la nueva vida

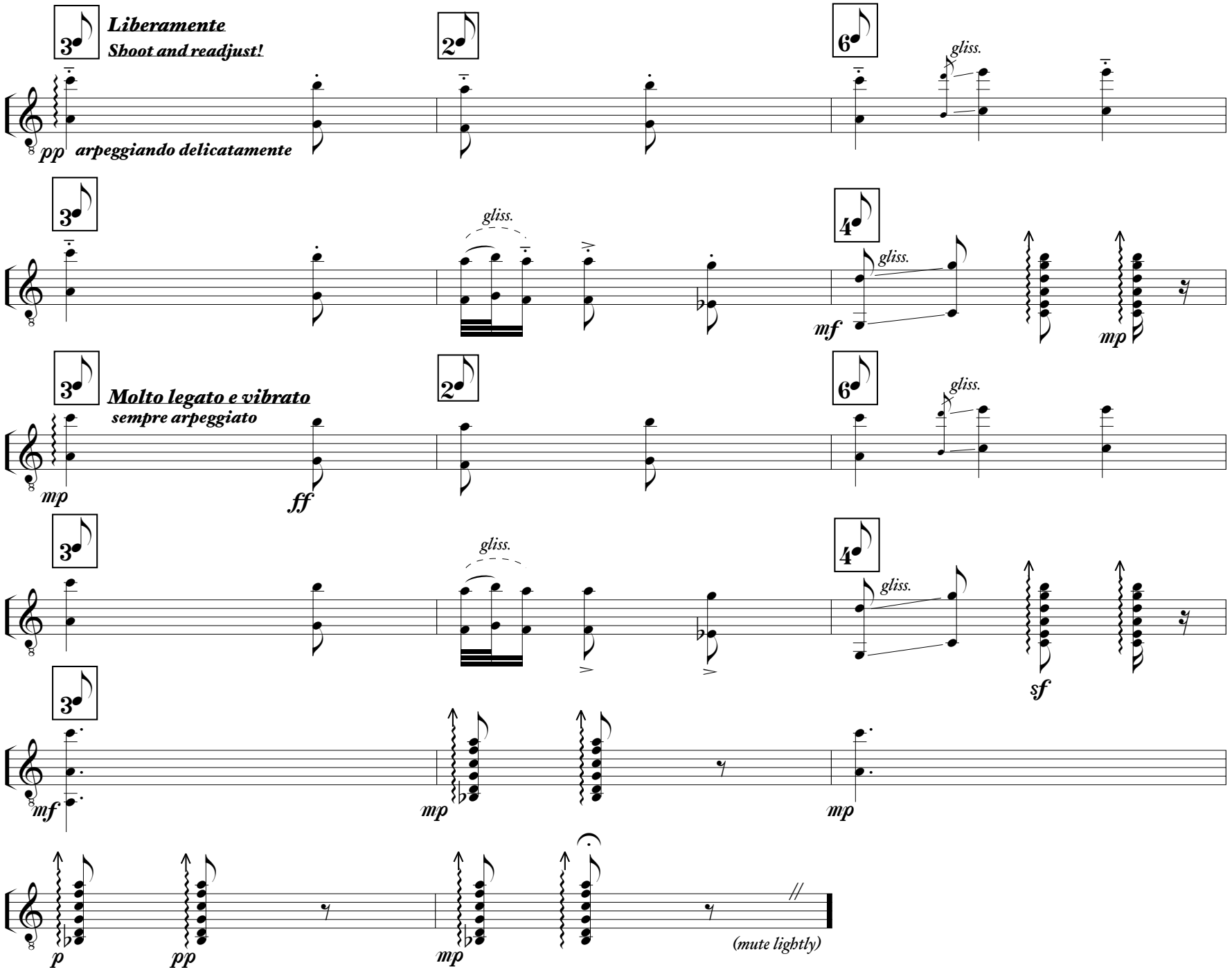


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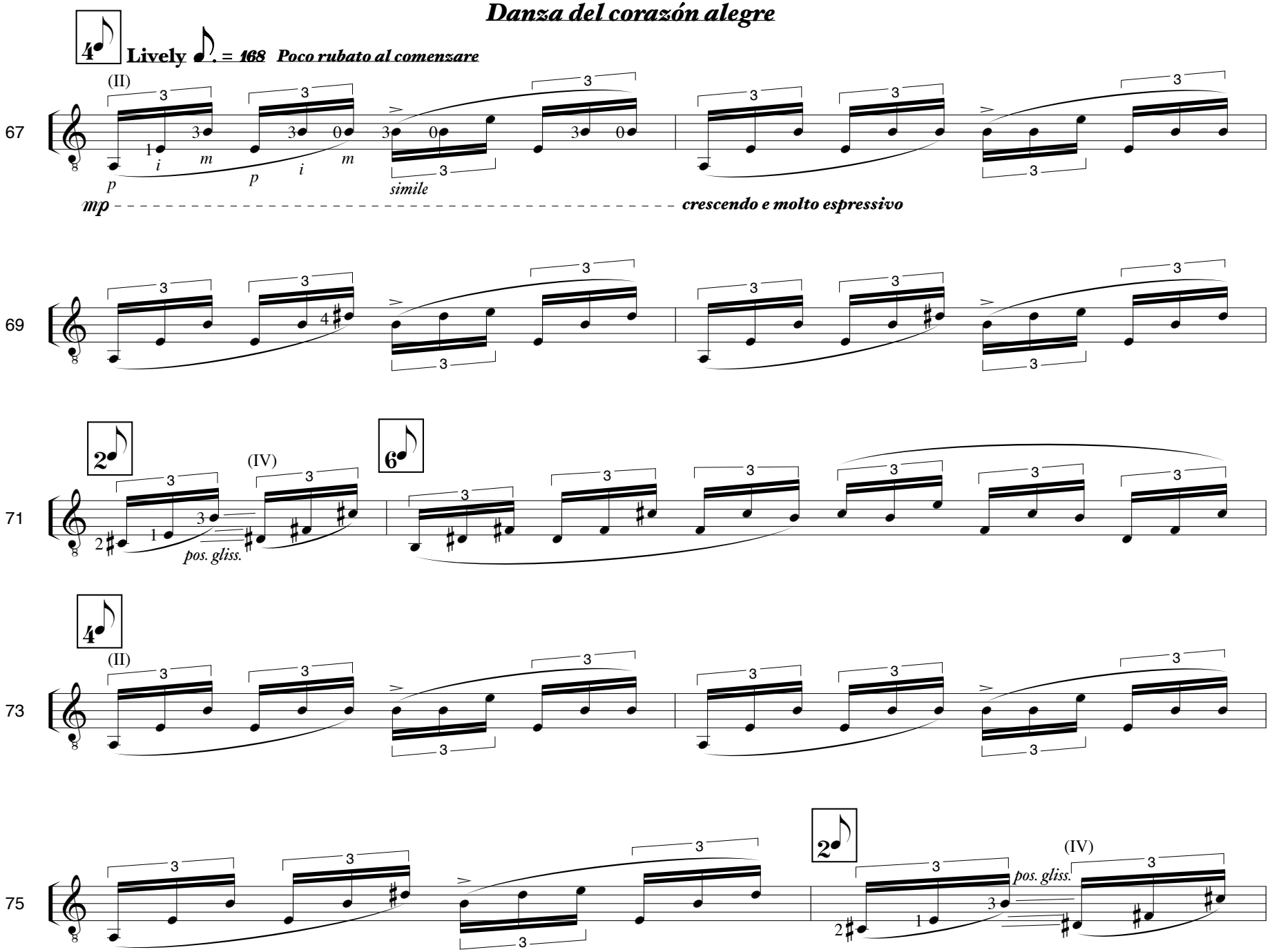
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Contemplación improvisatoria

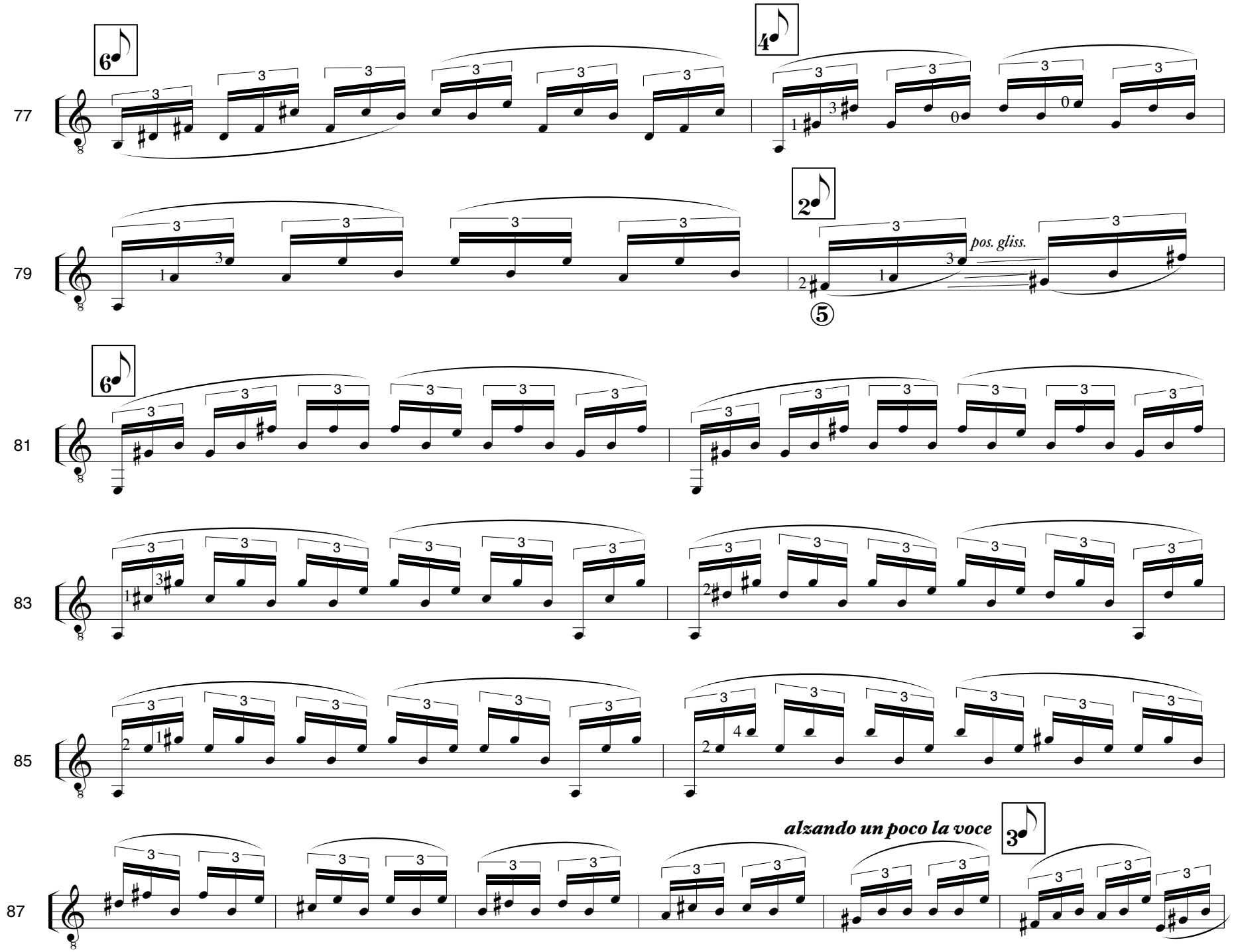


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Danza del corazón alegre

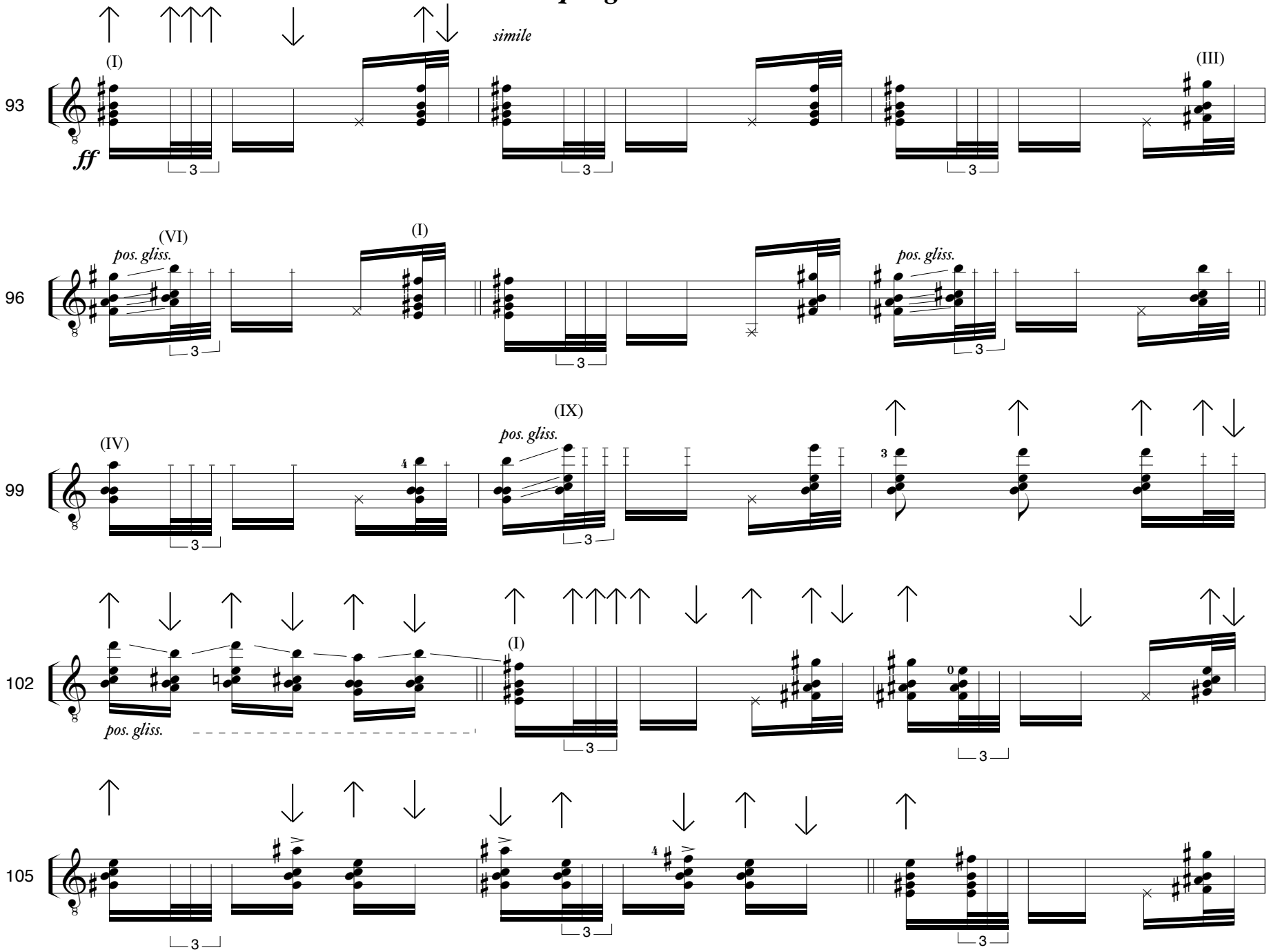


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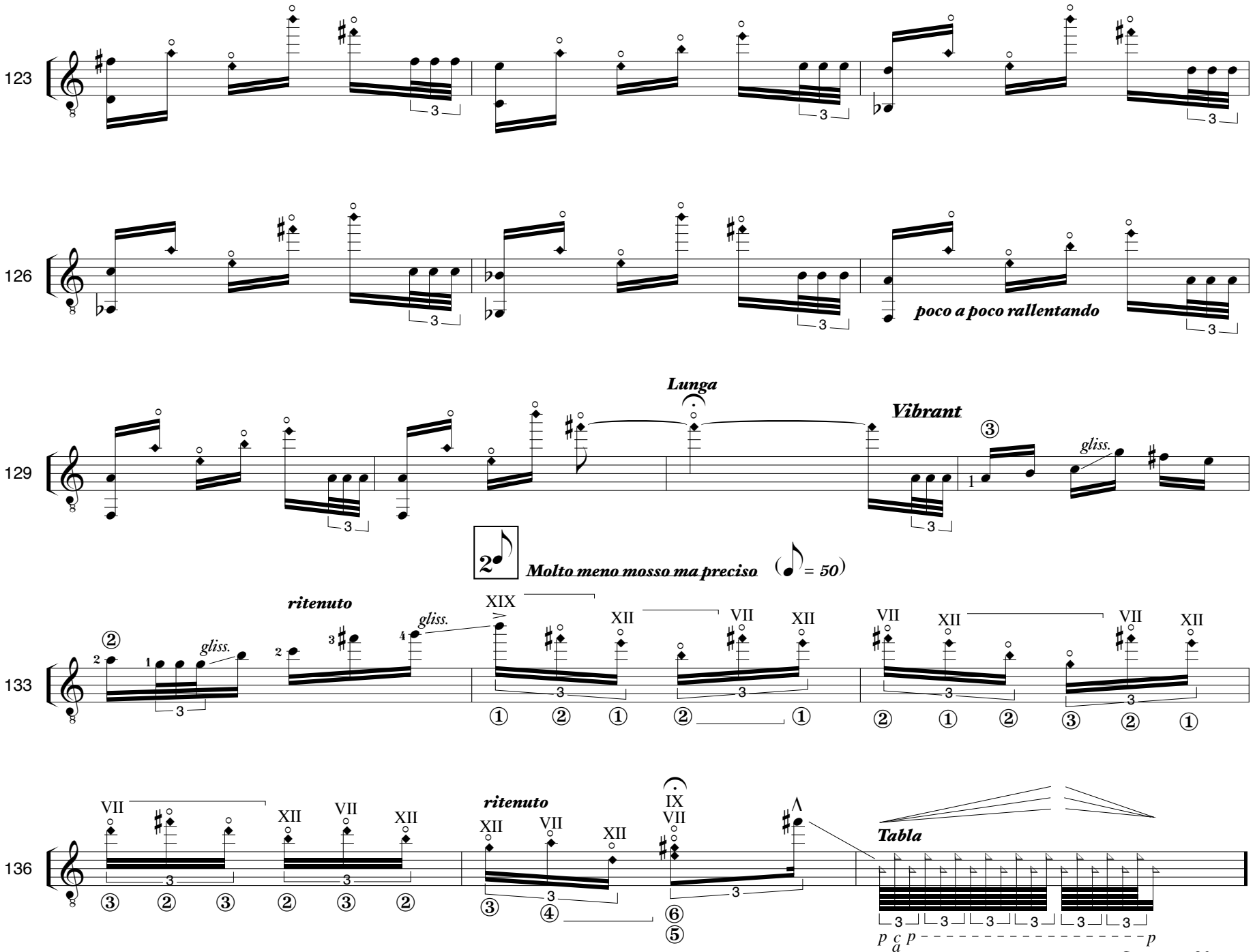
Huapango amistoso



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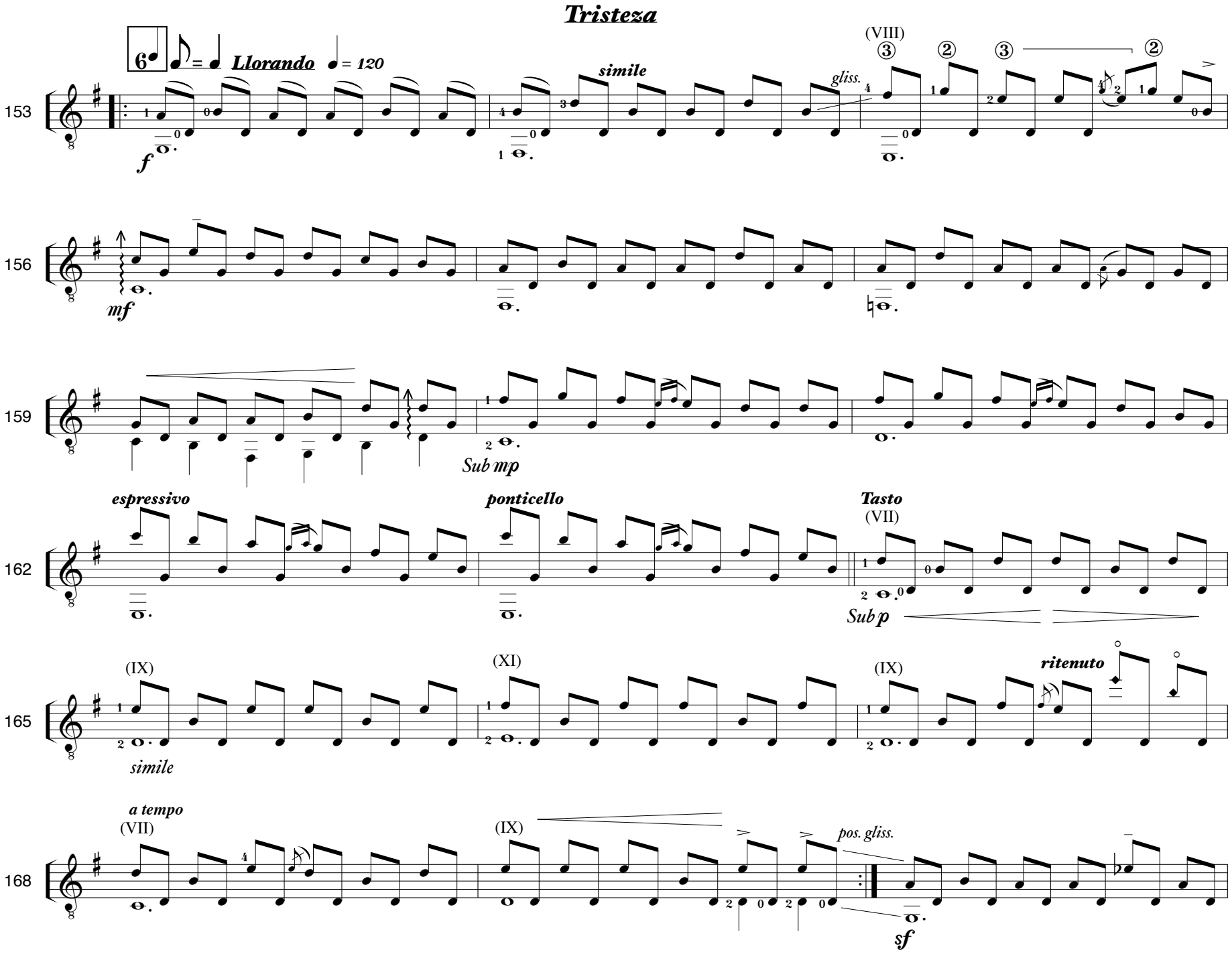


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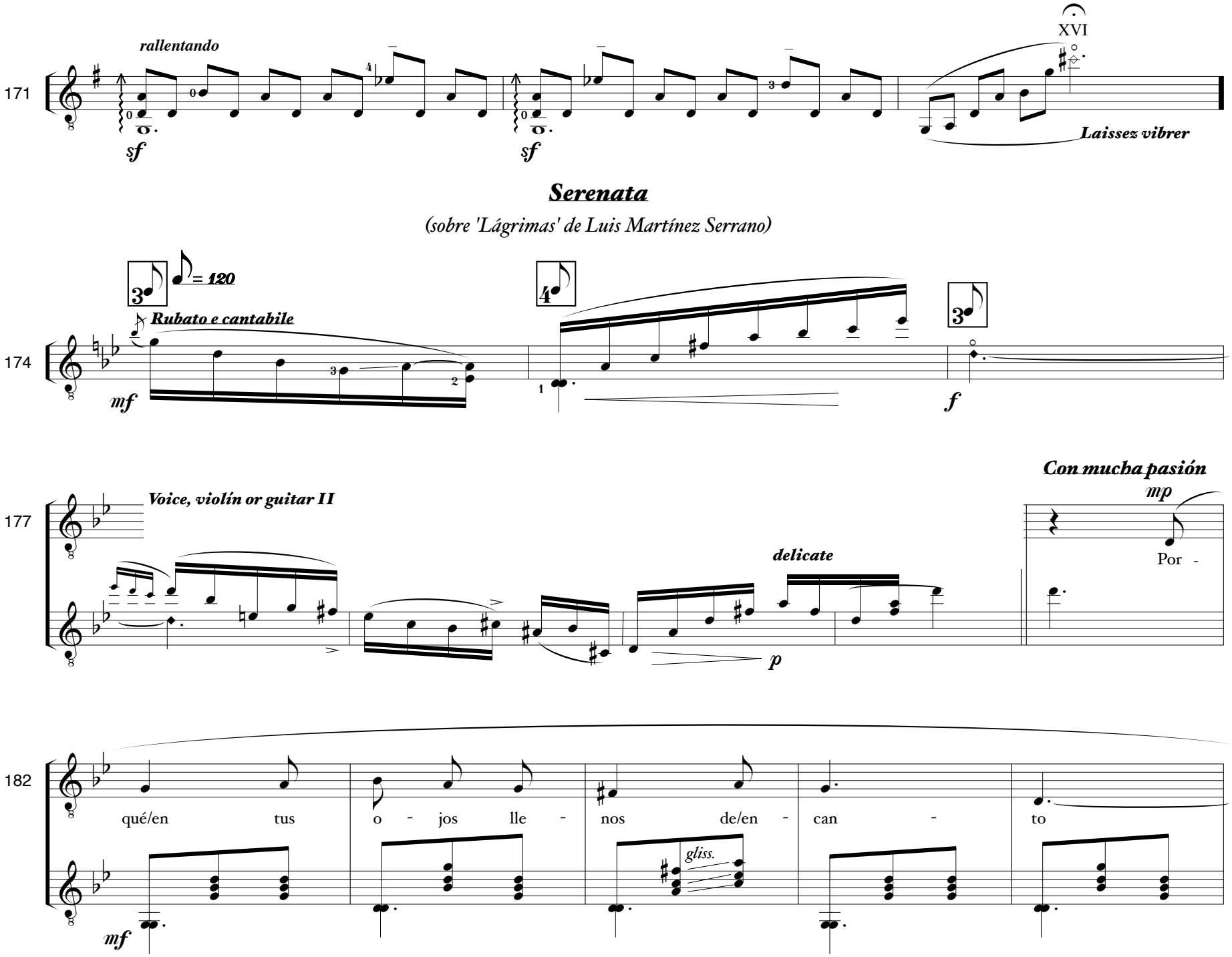
Lamento



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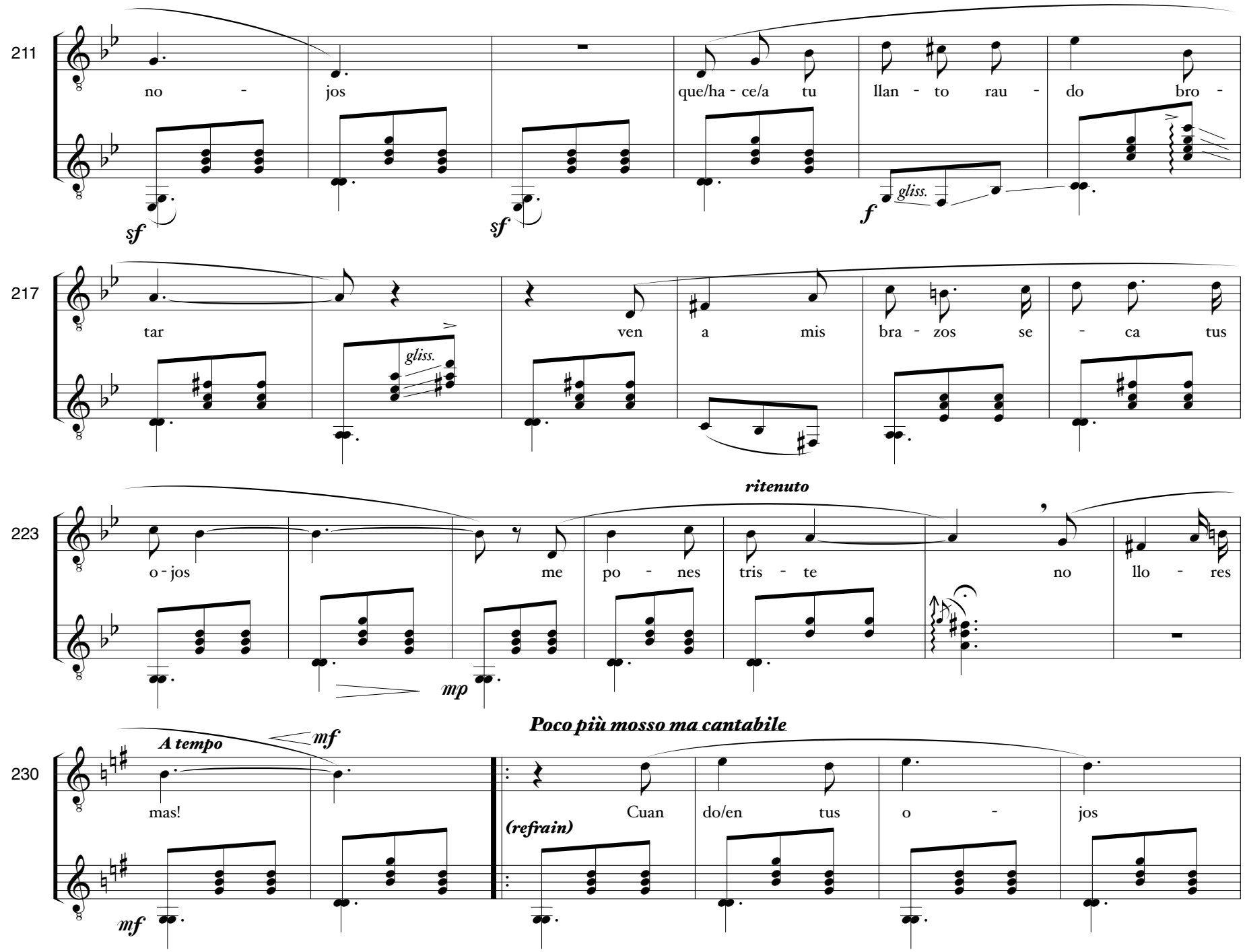
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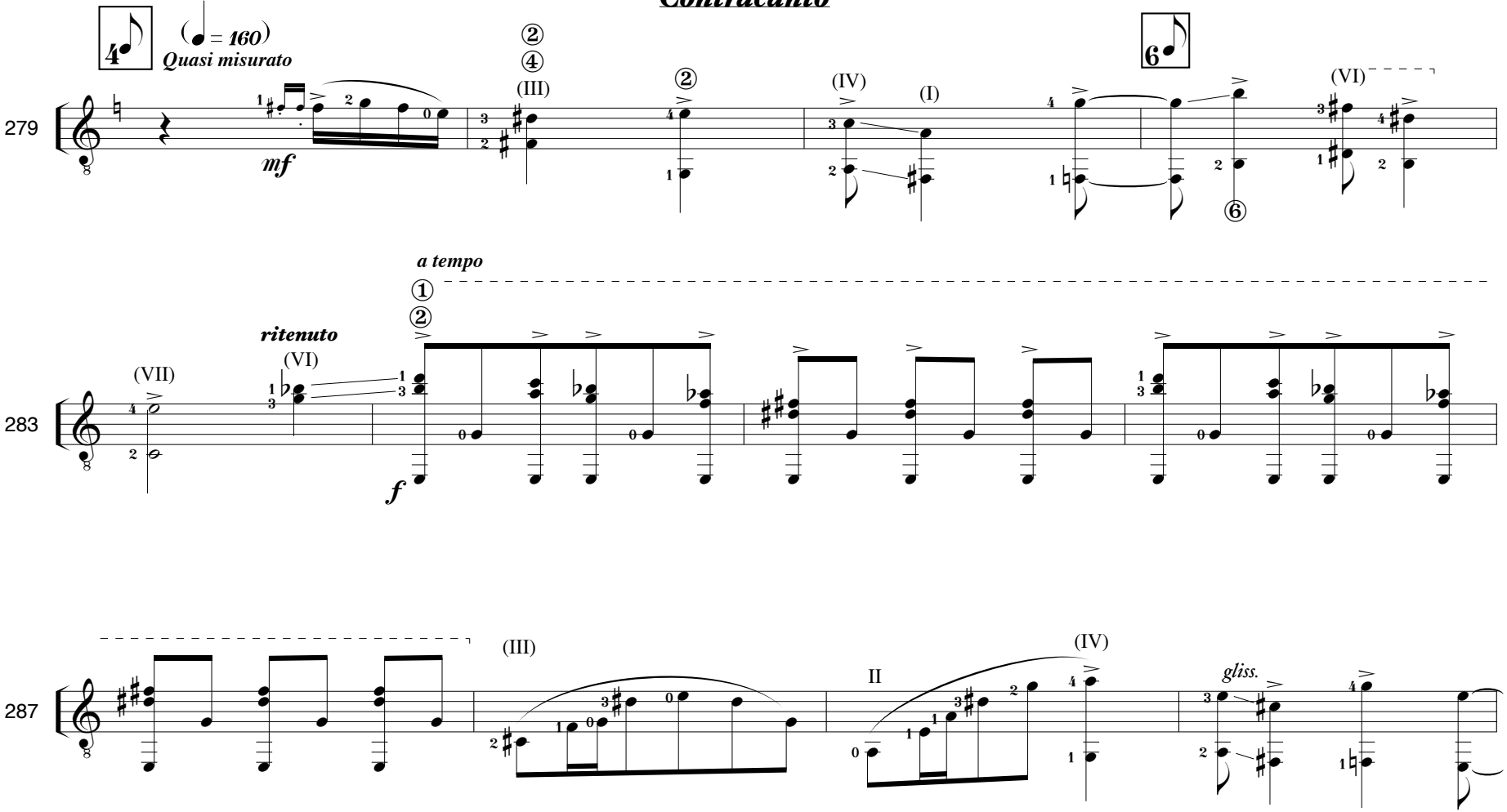


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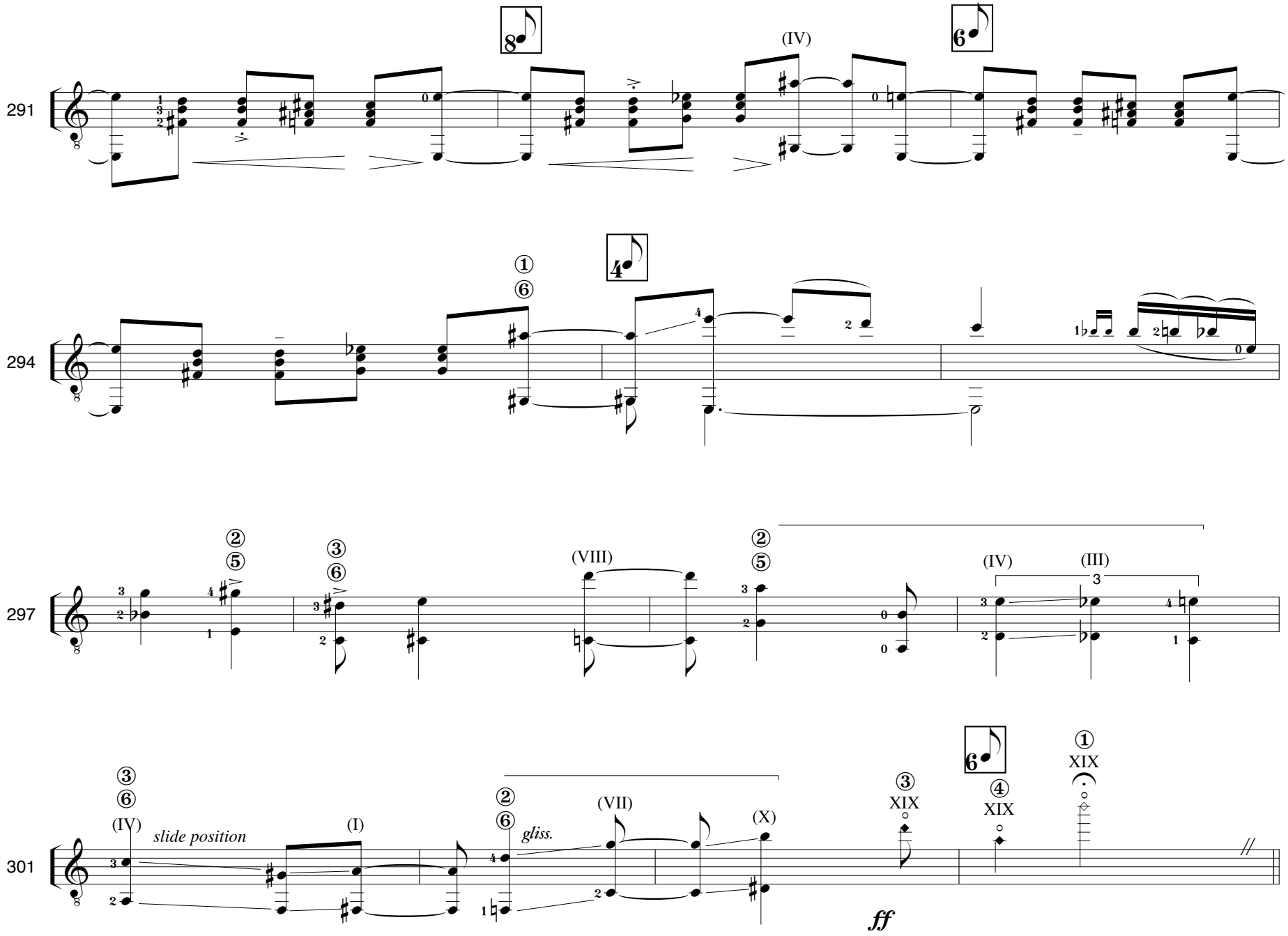
Un encuentro mágico



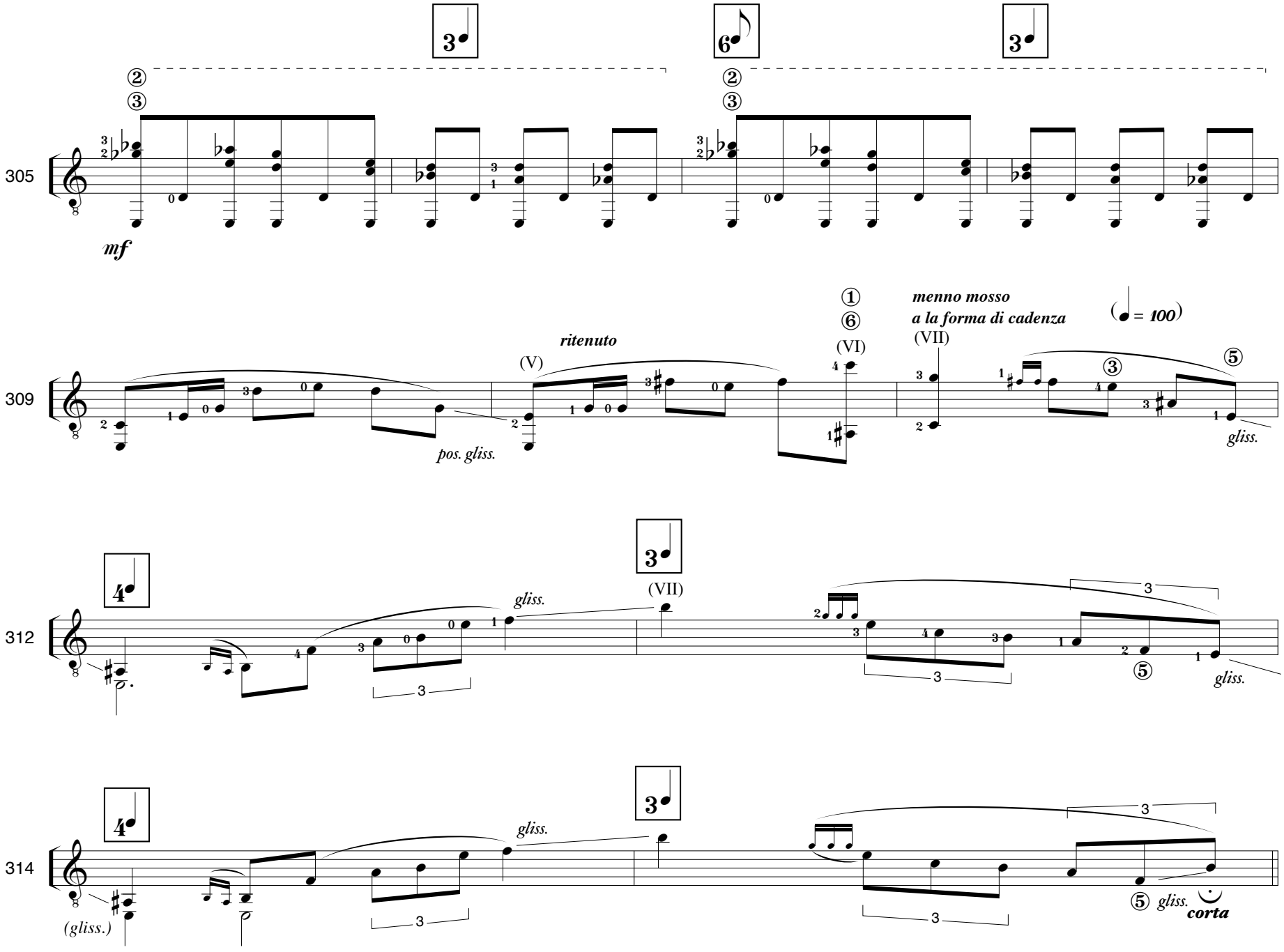
Contracanto



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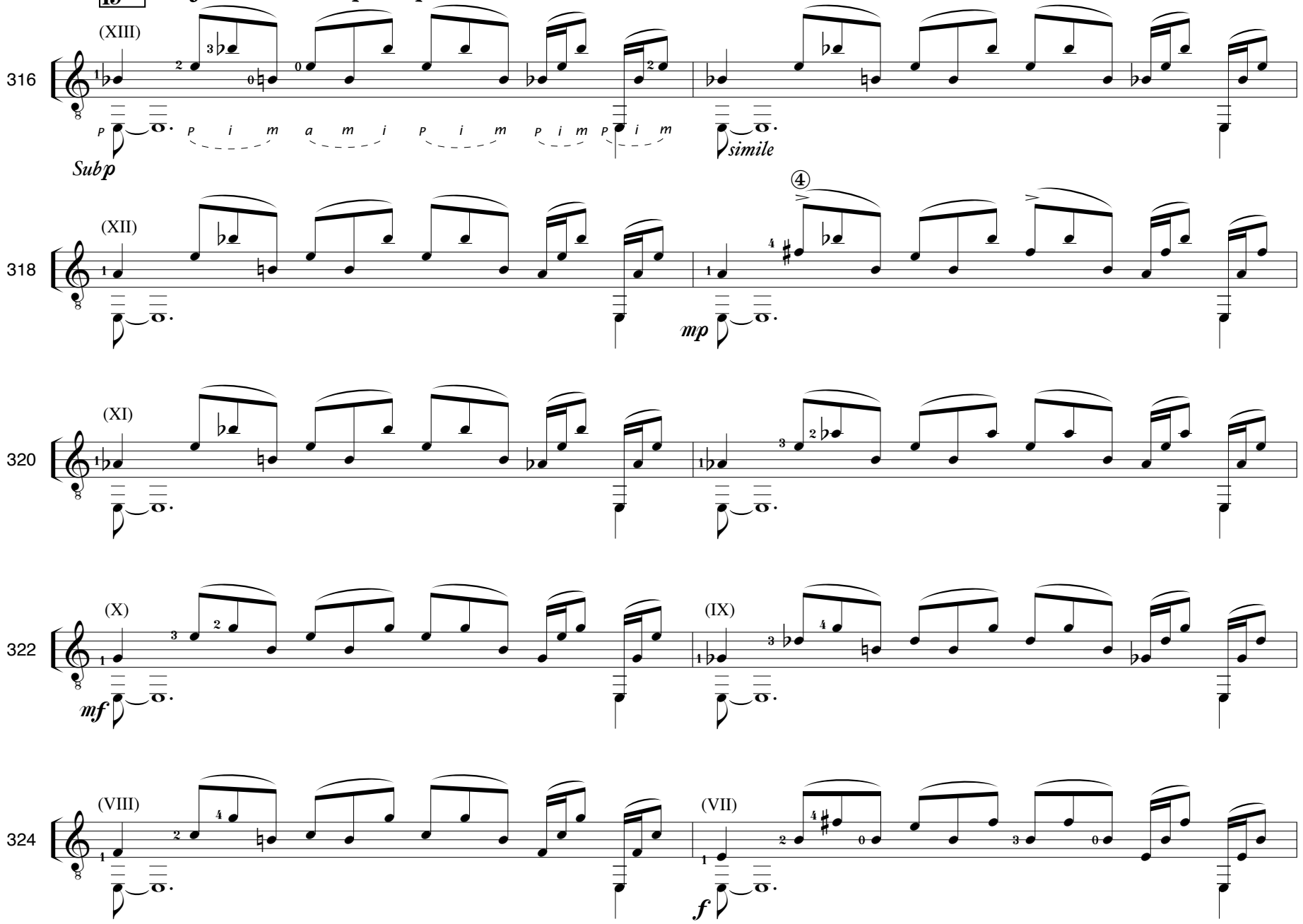
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Ofrenda última

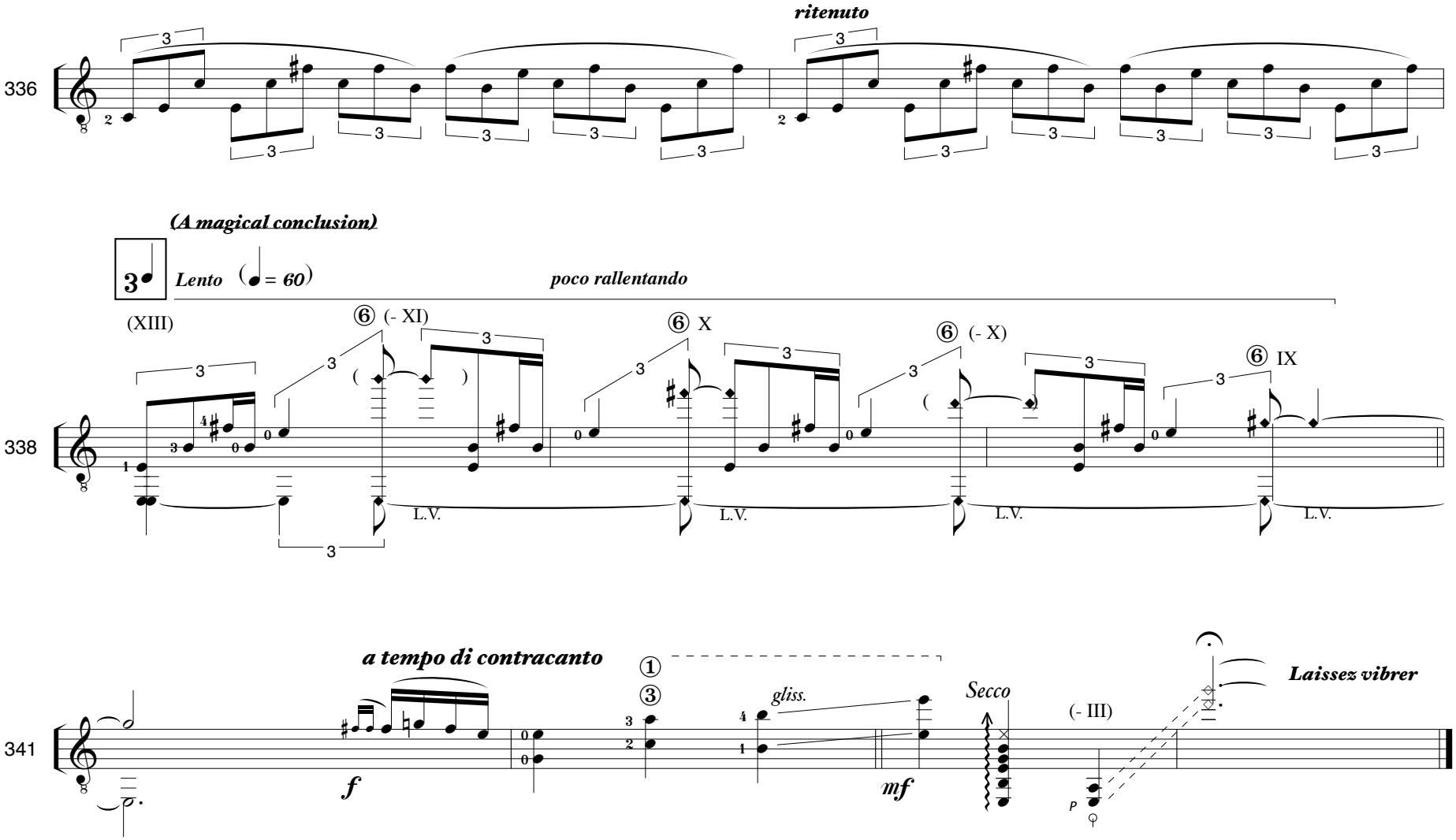
15 *Con forza e variando poco a poco*



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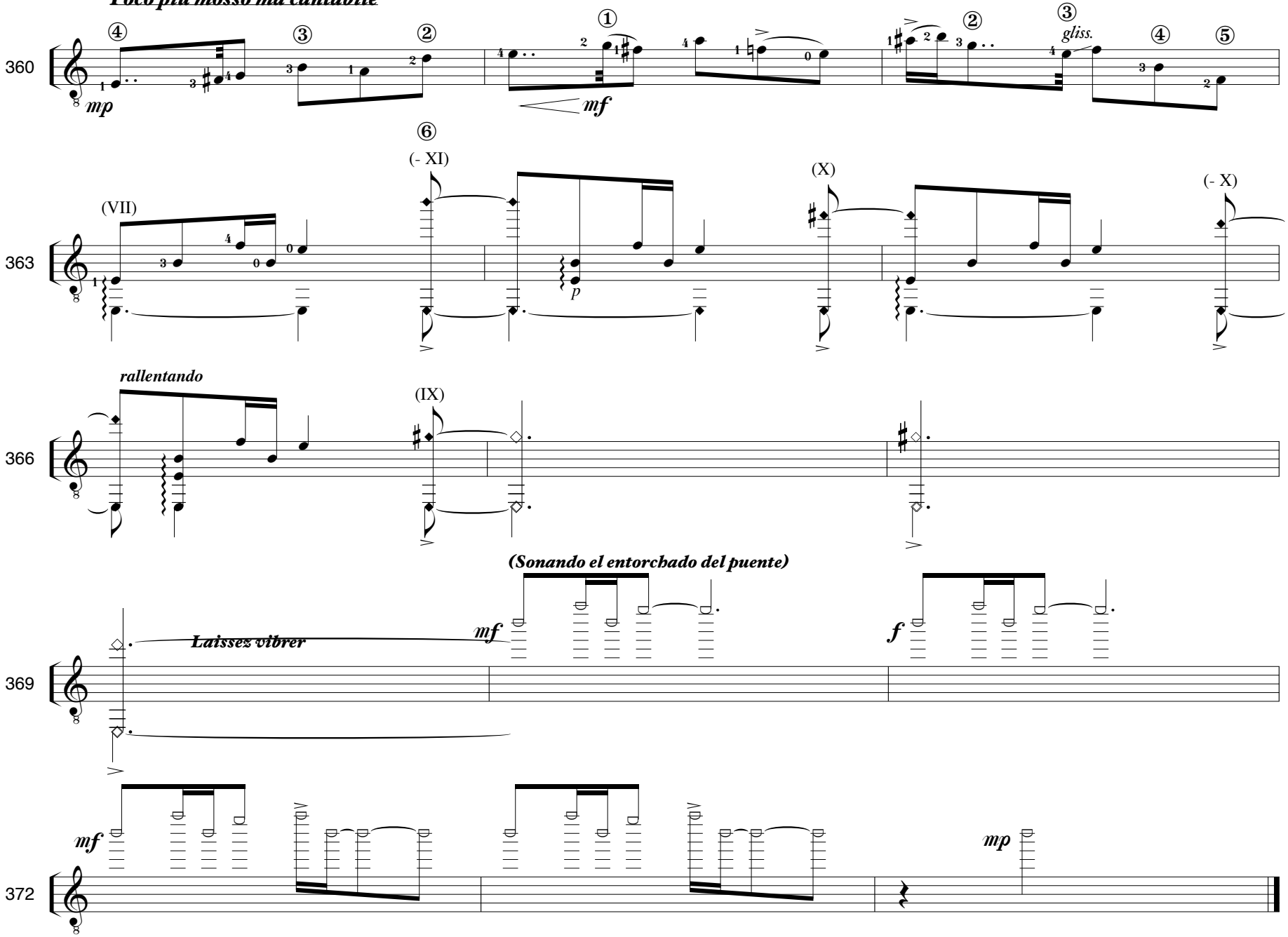
Apéndice no. 1

Meditación antígua



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Ofrenda de huesos



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